

**Miami Valley Fire/EMS Alliance
Firefighter Dependent Care Plan
Policy Guidelines**

Purpose:

The purpose of the policy is to provide guidelines in order to establish a method by which firefighter families can be cared for during a long-term incident.

Discussion:

The guideline is designed to assist fire employees and their families. Firefighters enter the service expecting to train, to be conditioned both mentally and physically to respond to any emergency that might arise. Firefighters must not become emotionally distracted because an uncalculated action or lapse of concentration can increase risk for everyone involved. Just as a department pre-plans and has contingencies for other emergencies, the problem of family welfare can be dealt with in the same manner. An example of this occurred in New Orleans during hurricane Katrina. The New Orleans Fire Department had the foresight to evacuate firefighters' families to safety so that the firefighters could focus on their jobs.

Policy Goals:

- ◆ To maintain a method to enable firefighters to have a reasonable level of assurance that their families are cared for so that the firefighter can perform his/her duties and responsibilities for the duration of the incident.
- ◆ To help teach firefighters' families disaster preparedness so that they are better able to be self-sufficient during the firefighters' absence.
- ◆ To help ensure that on-duty firefighters realize their responsibility to the citizens they serve.

Policy Procedure:

1. **Pre-event preparations for firefighters and their families** - The department should urge all of its members to take time to prepare their families for the possible disaster as they themselves would prepare professionally. This is a very critical component of a family care procedure.
 - a. **Identify Potential Risks:** Each family should identify the particular risks that might affect them – flood, snowstorm, transportation/hazmat, etc. Determine what type of disasters are most likely to occur and request information on how to prepare for each. Determine which disasters could be handled by sheltering in place and which may require evacuation.
 - b. **Identify Special Needs:** For example, families with very young children, elderly members, or special health care considerations may have different needs than other family members. Take these needs into consideration in your disaster planning. Also remember family pets and animals.
 - c. **Create a Disaster Plan:** There are many sources of information about creating a family disaster plan. The Internet contains literally thousands of sites discussing family disaster preparedness. For the sake of consistency the department may wish to recommend a site or sites. Several good sites include:
 - Federal Emergency Management Agency
 - Department of Defense
 - American Red Cross

Department of Home Land Security

- d. **Workshops:** The department may sponsor workshops for family members to review basic first aid, emergency household supplies, home safety checklist, and shutting off utilities. Pre-plans should include a home plan that reduces chances of injury and minimizes damage. Families should designate secondary shelter locations.
 - e. **Gather Emergency Supplies:** The various sources of family disaster plans offer vast quantities of information on how to prepare for different disasters. Most recommend six basics you should stock in you home: water, food, first aid supplies and bedding, emergency supplies and special items. Most recommend keeping enough supplies to meet your needs for three days.
 - f. **Practice and Maintain Your Plan:** Periodically quiz your family so they remember what to do. Check smoke and carbon monoxide detectors. Replace stored emergency supplies every three to six months. Test and recharge fire extinguishers. Be sure to store kit in convenient, watertight container in a place known to all family members. Keep a smaller version in the vehicle.
2. **Pre-event Preparations for The Department**
- a. **Have a family care policy in place:** Make sure that you have a well thought-out policy in place and that it is reviewed and updated regularly.
 - b. **Have current contact information on file:** This should be a voluntary program. The information sheet should include names, address, phone numbers, dependents, duty assignment, location where family members have agreed to meet in case of disaster and additional pertinent information i.e., medications, blood type. Keeping the data sheet current is very important. It is suggested to store information not only electronically but also in hard copy format. The information be available at all times.
 - c. **Develop “Mutual Aid Agreements”:** When families live in close proximity to one another, they can have a “mutual aid agreement” to check on each other’s homes and families. In many cases the department will be able to assign a person for Family Dependant Care. However, in some cases this might not be possible. The department should consider having a third party who could perform this function. It could be another local department, or a designated community member such as a pastor or church group. The department should also consider a worst case scenario and develop a mutual aid agreement with a fire department at a distance to either shelter or assist families. It is suggested that this fire department be far enough away that it would not be affected by the same disaster (50-100 miles). Make sure that contact information is readily available to the mutual group/department.
3. **Event Activities**
- a. **Assign a “Dependant Care Officer” (DCO):** Assign a formal DCO in the Incident Command Organization and decide who the DCO should report to - I.C.? Logistics? Planning?
 - b. **Duties of the DCO:** The DCO employs whatever measures are necessary, appropriate and feasible to determine the welfare of families in question. These measures may include one phone call; several phone calls or a trip to the residence or family meeting place. Once the status is determined, the information is conveyed

to the on-duty firefighter. The DCO should continue contact with families for periodic updates as to the status of incident. The DCO should also serve as the contact if family members have questions or needs.

Conclusion:

The Miami Valley Fire/EMS Alliance encourages each department and family to plan for natural or man-made disasters. Departments spend many hours educating the public by encouraging fire safety and preaching, “You’ve got to have a plan.” By having a Firefighter Family Care Support Plan it will reduce employees anxiety levels resulting in better performance and better service for the communities they serve.

